

## *New program trains inmates for employment, reduces recidivism*

By Patty Mandrell  
EDITOR

**B**ig sighs of relief, jumps for joy and shouts were heard from inmates at Central California Women's Facility who passed the first phase of a new certification process in the Prison Industry Authority Dental Lab last Wednesday.

Each inmate who passed the certification process received a certificate presented by CCWF Acting Warden Deborah Jacquez.

The Prison Industry Authority (PIA), the state agency that trains and certifies inmates for employment after release introduced a new skills certification program for inmates working in its dental lab at the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla.

PIA operates the only prison dental lab in California where women inmates manufacture dental prostheses for other prison inmates and wards in California correctional institutions. Skills learned while working in the lab assist inmates to obtain gainful employment after parole.

This new certification program was developed in partnership with the Productivity Training Corporation, which provides skills training to dental labs throughout the nation. John C. Ness, CEO of Productivity Training Corporation, explained, "The PIA program provides comprehensive knowledge of standard dental laboratory procedures and the practical ability to apply it. Students who complete the full PTC training program gain the skill set to work as dental laboratory technicians in all areas of manufacturing from metal design and fabrication to creating den-



PHOTO BY PATTY MANDRELL

Central California Women's Facility Acting Warden Deborah Jacquez presented Inmate Maggie Gamez with a certificate for completing the first phase in a new skills certification program in the prison's dental lab. Thirty-two inmates were successful in the testing process. Looking on is Private Industry Authority Supervisor Charles Babilla and PIA Superintendent II Luther Slack.

tures. The dental laboratory industry is under supplied with trained laboratory technicians, and our program provides the qualifications for an individual to launch into this career path."

A seminar was given last Wednesday to CCWF inmates in the PIA Dental Lab which concluded the first phase, "Simplifying Posterior Dental Anatomy (SPA). Thirty-two of the 32 eligible inmate technicians were certified in SPA. The next phase is "Oral Anatomy and Physiology" followed by the technical areas, "Record Base/Bite Block, Tooth Setup, Waxing and Finishing."

Inmates will be certified in each of these areas. The laboratory will be able to increase its efficiency after the inmates have been trained in all areas.

"New inmate technicians will be trained when they are assigned to the Laboratory," stated Prison Industries Superintendent II, Luther Slack.

Slack is manager of PIA Dental Laboratory at CCWF. The inmates in the program give Slack a great deal of credit for their success.

Slack received his training as a dental technician in the United States Navy. He worked as a dental technician for 39 years in every area of dental technology, including implants and cosmetic dentistry.

"I have worked for PIA since Nov. 2, 1995," stated Slack.

In addition to his dental training he has a B.A. in Social Science, M.A. in Education and a secondary credential in Social Studies.

Industry accredited skill certifications programs provide inmates with an opportunity to train and rehabilitate themselves prior to release. "The Prison Industry has found that inmates earning skill certifications from recognized industry accredited associations maintain a significantly higher rate of success. The average PIA revocation rate for inmates with an industry accredited certification is 12.57 percent as opposed to the overall revocation rate of 59.30 percent for other California prison inmates. This translates into safer com-

## CCWF

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

munities and also saves taxpayer dollars," said PIA's General Manager Matt Powers.

Charles Babilla, PIA Administrator congratulated the inmates on their success last Wednesday. "With your hard work and help form the staff you made it. You made history today," he stated.

Babilla introduced Acting Warden Jacquez, who presented the hard earned certificates. She also congratulated the inmates and commended them for their hard work and commitment to the program.

Inmate Maggie Gamez from Coachella Valley was more than just a little excited to receive her certification.

Gamez has been at CCWF for six years and is due to be released in the early part of November. She was sent to prison for a drug related crime.

She worked in the PIA electronics before being transferred to the Dental Lab. She said they spent weeks preparing for the exam that each inmate took over the phone.

"There is a good chance with the training and skills I've learned that I will be able to find a good job," Gamez stated. "That is very important to me. I have six children and I want to be able to support them and show them everything is going to be okay."

Gamez is quick to point out that she has learned more than just dental skills in the program. "The program has given me self-confidence," she stated.

Gamez commended her su-

pervisor, Slack. "He has been our strength. When we think we can't do anymore, he pushes us on. He has picked us up and is a constant encourager," she stated. "He is a person I will remember always."

Gamez gives a lot of the credit to God. "Without Him I would never have made it," she said.

She is looking forward with great anticipation to going home. This 38-year-old mother of six wants to get on with her life. The hardest part of prison she says has been being without her children. The first thing she wants to do is just hold her children and assure them that things are going to be all right. "And in my state of mind today I can make that promise," she quickly added.

Gamez was about 14 years of age when she first experimented with drugs. Peer pressure led her into the drug world which soon became her whole world. She remembers her lowest point was when her youngest daughter was taken away from her right after birth.

Her advice to young people is to remember that they are never really alone. "Someone will listen. Find that someone," she said.

In the bad there is always some good and Gamez found the good while in prison. "The inmates will always be a part of my life. This is where I grew," she stated.

Gamez definitely plans to use the skills she has learned in the Dental Program to make her life and the lives of her children better.

Lisa McKenzie, 33, of Southern California also passed the first phase, "Simplifying Posterior Dental Anatomy" last

week. She too is in prison for a drug related crime and has been at CCWF for two and a half years. She is due to be released in three and a half months.

Before being transferred to the Dental Lab McKenzie worked in the Chapel and the Central Kitchen.

McKenzie hopes to pass two more phases before she is released. Besides learning important skills McKenzie says the program has helped her gain more confidence in herself. "I know the training I have received will help me find a job," she said.

McKenzie got involved with drugs for the money. I had three children and no help. "I thought the drug way out was the only way out," she said.

Her advice to young people is, "Education is everything," she said. "Money is not all it is cracked up to be. I would rather be eating beans and rice than be in prison."

She warns young people, "Don't let yourself be backed into a corner. There is help out there. You just have to look for it."

McKenzie agrees with Gamez that the hardest part of being in prison is being separated from her children.

She has learned a great deal in the last two and a half years.

McKenzie commended supervisor, Slack, as being very knowledgeable. "In this program I'm treated with respect. Luther sees past the crime. He sees us for us," she stated.

She says she really wants to make her life better and she knows the training she has received in the Dental Lab will help her do that.

With the introduction of the dental skills certifications, PIA now offers several programs where inmates can earn certifications from Industry accredited associations including: National Association of Institutional Linen Management-certified laundry and linen management, certified washroom technician; American Board of Opticianry-certified optician; American Welding Society-certified welder; National Institute for Metalworking Skills-certified machinist, certified metal former/stamper; CA Dept of Food and Agriculture-licensed pasteurizer; Federal Emergency Management Institute-HazMat, decision making/problem solving, effective communication; Electronics Technicians' Association-certified customer services specialist, certified electronics technician; PBS Video Training Series-GED, workplace essential skills; Stiles Computer-Based Training Modules-Weeks Machining Center Programming.

PIA is the State organization that provides productive job assignments to inmates in California's correctional institutions. PIA products and services are available to governmental entities, including federal, state and local governmental agencies. While PIA work assignments help train inmates to prepare for employment after parole, the program also reduces idleness and decreases violence in the institutions. Court-ordered restitution/fines are deducted from the wages earned by PIA inmates and are transferred to the Crime Victims' Restitution Fund.